



Interview Summary: Deputy Chief Jason Crowley (Windsor Police Service)

Deputy Chief Jason Crowley was interviewed by Frank Au, Mark Pritchard, Eric Brousseau, and Misha Boutilier on August 15, 2022. Questions about this summary should be directed to Eric Brousseau.

Background

Jason Crowley is the Interim Deputy Chief – Operations of the Windsor Police Service (**WPS**). In this role, he oversees all operations for WPS and manages four Superintendents. Mr. Crowley joined WPS and has served in a variety of tactical and emergency response roles. Between 2018 and May 2022, Deputy Chief Crowley served as Superintendent – Investigation Services with oversight of the Investigation Services Division between 2018 and May 2022, including when the Ambassador Bridge was blockaded in February 2022. Deputy Chief Crowley took the Canadian Police College Critical Incident Commander (**CIC**) course in 2017. He served as the WPS CIC during the February 2022 Windsor protests and blockade of the Ambassador Bridge.

Pre-Arrival Intelligence, Planning, and Engagement with Protestors

On February 3, WPS learned on social media and confirmed with protest organizers that protestors were planning a “slow-roll” demonstration in Windsor. WPS Chief Pamela Mizuno informed Deputy Chief Crowley that he would be charge of WPS’s response.

WPS has a dedicated Criminal Intelligence Bureau (the **Bureau**) that networks with other Canadian police services. The Bureau reported to Inspector Karel DeGraaf, who in turn reported to Deputy Chief Crowley. Deputy Chief Crowley asked the Bureau to gather open-source intelligence on the slow-roll demonstration on social media, and he disseminated that intelligence widely within WPS to provide situational awareness.

Inspector DeGraaf received intelligence reports and briefings from Project Hendon, an OPP-led public order intelligence sharing network. Before February 4, Project Hendon did not report intelligence of a potential blockade at Windsor. Neither did the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (**RCMP**) or the Canada Border Services Agency (**CBSA**). On February 4, Project Hendon provided intelligence that the slow-roll protestors might attempt to blockade the Ambassador Bridge on February 7, but this intelligence was unconfirmed.

Deputy Chief Crowley sat on the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police Emergency Planning Committee (the **OACP Committee**). The OACP Committee met 2-3 times per week in January-February 2022 to share information about protest activity related to COVID-19 measures. During the first week of February 2022, Deputy Chief Crowley asked at Committee meetings if other Committee member police agencies had intelligence on Windsor. He did not receive any intelligence until February 4, when he was told that others on the Committee had heard unconfirmed rumblings of a potential blockade.



On February 3-4, Deputy Chief Crowley requested an operational plan for the slow-roll. At this time, Deputy Chief Crowley did not anticipate a blockade because WPS had experience policing slow-roll anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown protests since 2021 and none of these protests involved an occupation or blockade of the Ambassador Bridge. Based on these prior experiences, Deputy Chief Crowley did not expect an occupation or blockade similar to the Freedom Convoy that had occupied Ottawa. The initial operational plan focused on policing a slow-roll protest similar to the ones WPS had previously experienced, although it did include a plan for the potential blocking of the bridge.

Before the slow-roll arrived, Deputy Chief Crowley had an inspector reach out to a protest organizer, communicate the applicable laws to him, and inform him that WPS would attend the protest to ensure community safety. The organizer was cooperative and stated that the protestors' intention was to bring awareness to their cause. Deputy Chief Crowley stated that WPS was happy to facilitate a protest as long as it remained lawful.

On February 4, Deputy Chief Crowley spoke with a CBSA officer responsible for the Ambassador Bridge and RCMP border integrity officers based in London, Ontario. The CBSA and RCMP officers told Deputy Chief Crowley that they had no operational plan and were relying on WPS to police the slow-roll. They communicated to Deputy Chief Crowley that policing the slow-roll was not their responsibility because the slow-roll was expected to occur down the road from the Ambassador Bridge, rather than on the Ambassador Bridge itself. The RCMP officers explained that RCMP border integrity resources were being pulled to the crossings at Niagara Falls and Sarnia, and were not available to assist WPS.

Arrival of Slow-Roll Protestors and Creation of the Blockade

On February 6, the slow roll protestors gathered at Mic Mac Park and WPS began liaising with OPP, RCMP, CBSA, and Public Works and Procurement Canada (**PSPC**). Later on February 6, WPS received a Project Hendon intelligence report that stated that protestors would blockade the Ambassador Bridge on February 7 if their demands were not met. On the evening of February 7, WPS officers engaged with protestors who had parked on the property of Assumption High School without the school board's consent to convince them to leave. WPS had staged two contracted tow trucks at a distance from the high school in case it became necessary to tow protestor vehicles. A protestor spotted the tow trucks, and the protestors became confrontational; WPS officers observed protestors exiting their vehicles with tire irons. WPS officers retreated, and the protestors eventually moved their vehicles. After this incident, protestors jammed the towing company's phones and threatened to go to the tow yard. WPS deployed officers to the tow yard in response.

On the morning of February 7, someone called WPS dispatch and stated that the protestors would blockade the Ambassador Bridge if their demands were not met. By this time, WPS had also received intelligence that approximately 50-60 protestor vehicles were gathering at the Comber rest station opposite Highway 401, and had assigned surveillance officers to Comber. Around this time, Deputy Chief Crowley received information from then-Deputy Chief (now Interim Chief) Jason Bellaire that 100 trucks might be coming to Windsor from Ottawa. Deputy Chief Crowley also received information



from social media that additional truckers were waiting on concession roads to join the protest, but this information later proved inaccurate.

On the morning of February 7, WPS deemed the slow-roll protest to be a critical incident and appointed Deputy Chief Crowley as CIC. He explained that under WPS policies, a critical incident is a matter that is both outside the scope of regular policing and requires a high level of command training and oversight to resolve. Deputy Chief Crowley assembled a command team and established an operations centre. The following members joined the command team:

- Inspector DeGraaf: Crowley's number two officer, an Intelligence Inspector;
- Inspectors Crosby and Murphy – Logistics;
- Sergeant McMahon – Intelligence;
- Patrol Superintendent Tim Berthiaume.

On the morning of February 7, Deputy Chief Crowley met with WPS patrol supervisors from the superintendent to the staff sergeant ranks to devise a revised plan for the potential blockade. Deputy Chief Crowley explained that he identified a need to devise a revised plan because the initial operational plan focused on the expected slow-roll protest and only gave limited consideration to a potential blockade. He and the WPS patrol supervisors rejected attempting to block egresses into Windsor because this option was not logistically possible. Instead, they decided to attempt to control the intersection directly in front of the Ambassador Bridge, which they assumed would prevent the slow-roll protestors from blocking the bridge. Deputy Chief Crowley kept Chief Mizuno and then-Deputy Chief Bellaire updated, and met with City of Windsor (City) fire and emergency medical services teams to plan for a potential blockade. He also met with local OPP commanders and shared intelligence with them.

On February 6-7, Deputy Chief Crowley also spoke with colleagues on the OACP Committee about the potential blockade of the Ambassador Bridge, including high-ranking RCMP and OPP officers. Those colleagues told Deputy Chief Crowley to keep them informed, but informed him that they had no resources available because the blockade had not yet occurred. Deputy Chief Crowley understood that the RCMP and OPP's priority at the time was Ottawa.

On February 7, WPS liaison officers attempted to identify protest leaders and discuss the protestors' plans with the leaders. Deputy Chief Crowley stated that some protestors wanted to speak to the officers, but other protestors swarmed the officers, forcing them to retreat. He explained that WPS did not have the resources it required to effectively police the protest at this time.

Protestors blocked the lanes that lead to the Ambassador Bridge on February 7 in the early evening. Deputy Chief Crowley stated that protestors improvised this blockade in response to the steps WPS took to control the intersection directly in front of the bridge.



WPS Response to Blockade and Arrival of OPP and Additional Officers

After protestors established a blockade, Deputy Chief Crowley moved to the Emergency Operations Centre (**EOC**), which was located in a fire hall 10 kilometers from the Ambassador Bridge. Deputy Chief Crowley expanded his command team by adding a WPS major crime detective to identify protestors, and adding an intelligence staff person. Two CBSA officers also joined. Deputy Chief Crowley served as CIC during night shifts, and Inspector DeGraff served as CIC during day shifts.

On February 8 at 6:30 a.m., OPP Superintendent Mike McDonell called Deputy Chief Crowley and asked if WPS needed assistance. Deputy Chief Crowley responded that WPS did need assistance, and Superintendent McDonell stated that he would speak to OPP Commissioner Thomas Carrique. In the evening of February 8, WPS learned that local OPP officers were starting to direct traffic from Highway 401 away from the Ambassador Bridge. OPP Staff Sergeant Smith also joined the EOC that evening to serve as the OPP's incident commander, a role which Deputy Chief Crowley explained was a less senior level of command to the CIC role. On the morning of February 10, an OPP command team headed by Superintendent Dana Earley arrived.¹ Deputy Chief Crowley stated that Superintendent Earley was competent and confident, and she came highly recommended from officers he respected. An OPP public order unit (**POU**), along with POU units from the RCMP and the London, Hamilton, and Waterloo Police Services, also arrived between February 9-10.

Deputy Chief Crowley explained that WPS's role between February 7-9 was to preserve peace and ensure public safety in Windsor and manage the blockade until additional OPP officers and officers from other police agencies arrived. He stated that WPS succeeded in doing so, even though it was under-resourced. Deputy Chief Crowley explained that negotiations with the protestors were difficult. At times, there were three separate protest areas: the south side of the bridge, the north side of the bridge, and Tecumseh Road.² Each area contained a distinct protestor group operating under a different mandate. Deputy Chief Crowley stated that WPS reached agreements with one of the protestor groups to reopen a corridor, only for another group to block it. Deputy Chief Crowley also observed that protestors became more abrasive and confrontational during the evenings, and that police could observe protestors drinking and smoking marijuana on live feeds at these times.

The OPP Provincial Liaison Team (**PLT**) arrived in Windsor on February 8. Deputy Chief Crowley was not familiar with PLT before February 7-8. He explained that OPP PLT were able to engage with protestors more successfully than WPS had before February 8 because of their training in liaison work and the fact that they had cultivated relationships with the protestors before the blockade was established. He stated that the OPP PLT was

¹ Superintendent Earley was an Inspector at the time of the blockade and was subsequently promoted.

² Tecumseh Road intersects Huron Church Road / Highway 3, the principal highway leading to the Ambassador Bridge.



able to achieve successes that WPS could not, such as opening lanes and keeping an emergency lane open.

On February 10, police learned of threats to blockade WPS headquarters, the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel, and the Windsor airport by monitoring the protestors' chat on Zello, an open-source cell phone application used for communication. Police determined that the protestors' leadership was fractured by monitoring the chats. One of the protest leaders strongly advocated to block the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel, but the other leaders objected because people were working at the Tunnel. The threats did not materialize.

[The Critical Incident Command System, Shared Command with OPP, and the Development of the Public Order Plan](#)

WPS and OPP established a shared command on February 10 after the arrival of OPP Superintendent Earley and the OPP command team. Superintendent Earley served as the OPP's CIC, and Deputy Chief Crowley and Inspector DeGraaf continued to serve as WPS CIC for the night and day shifts, respectively. Deputy Chief Crowley explained that Superintendent Earley was responsible for public order planning and deployment, and commanded the public order enforcement operation that was launched on February 12.

Between February 10-11, the OPP developed a public order plan. The plan was prepared by an OPP Inspector and Staff Sergeant. They presented the plan to OPP CIC Superintendent Earley, who approved the plan. WPS did not participate in the development of the plan. Instead, Superintendent Earley consulted with Deputy Chief Crowley and Inspector DeGraaf on the plan after it was ready, and WPS provided logistical support for the plan.

Deputy Chief Crowley described the planning and command process as smooth and cooperative. He stated that he and WPS lacked the resources or experience to police a major public order event like the Ambassador Bridge blockade, and that OPP had that experience. Deputy Chief Crowley explained that he knew that WPS needed help and respected OPP's expertise, so he supported OPP taking the lead and telling WPS what to do. Deputy Chief Crowley credited WPS's collaborative mindset and willingness to let OPP take the lead for the success of the public order enforcement operation. Deputy Chief Crowley explained that he and Superintendent Earley saw things the same way, never had fundamentally differing opinions, and cooperated well together.

Deputy Chief Crowley also explained that Chief Mizuno and then-Deputy Chief Bellaire respected his and Inspector DeGraaf's autonomy as the WPS CICs. Deputy Chief Crowley updated Chief Mizuno and then-Deputy Chief Bellaire during the protests. Most of Deputy Chief Crowley's interactions were with then-Deputy Chief Bellaire, but he also spoke with Chief Mizuno every once in a while. Both Chief Mizuno and then-Deputy Chief Bellaire respected his and Inspector DeGraaf's autonomy as the CICs and did not interfere with operational decisions. Deputy Chief Crowley stated that he felt that he had the trust of Chief Mizuno and then-Deputy Chief Bellaire, and that Deputy Chief Bellaire respected Chief Mizuno's decision to appoint Deputy Chief Crowley as CIC. Deputy Chief Crowley characterized then-Deputy Chief Bellaire as supportive: he asked Deputy Chief



Crowley what he needed, and assisted when Deputy Chief Bellaire made personnel requests. Deputy Chief Crowley also stated that the OPP Chief Superintendent respected Superintendent Earley's role as CIC, which also contributed to the success of the shared command system.

WPS Relationship with the City, the CBSA and the Ambassador Bridge Company

Deputy Chief Crowley stated that WPS collaborated effectively with the City of Windsor during the blockade. On the morning of February 7, Deputy Chief Crowley was able to quickly obtain traffic engineering and barricade support from the City. He also credited the City's emergency planner, who is based out of the City's fire department, for effectively liaising with truck drivers and heavy equipment operators who work for the City of Windsor and who were required to move jersey barriers.

Deputy Chief Crowley stated that CBSA was a valuable support partner to WPS. He mentioned that CBSA shared camera footage with WPS that allowed WPS to identify protestors jumping curbs and additional protest vehicles.

After the Ambassador Bridge closed, the Detroit International Bridge Company (the **Bridge Company**), which operates the U.S. side of the Ambassador Bridge, called WPS and demanded that the bridge be reopened. When the blockade began, the Bridge Company did not immediately stop trucks from coming across the bridge from the U.S. side. Later, the Bridge Company began to stop sending trucks to the Ambassador Bridge and re-route them to the Port Huron / Sarnia crossing. On February 7, WPS also learned that the Bridge Company was concerned that the trucks stranded on the Ambassador Bridge were dangerous to its structural integrity. WPS cleared those trucks from the Ambassador Bridge by 10:22 p.m. on February 7, and no trucks were subsequently stranded on the bridge for the rest of the blockade.

The Effect of the Superior Court Injunction and Provincial Emergency Declaration

On February 11, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice granted the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association's motion for an injunction prohibiting a blockade of the Ambassador Bridge. Deputy Chief Crowley stated that the injunction assisted with the policing of the blockade in two ways. First, the injunction gave the police a tool to communicate to protestors that their actions were unlawful. Second, the injunction gave police additional legislative authority to act in addition to arresting protestors for mischief over \$5,000 under the *Criminal Code*.

On February 11, the Premier of Ontario declared a province-wide emergency under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*. Deputy Chief Crowley stated that the provincial emergency declaration did not impact the public order plan and enforcement operation.



The Public Order Plan and Enforcement Operation

The OPP-prepared public order plan was ready by 7:00 p.m. on February 11, the time the Ontario Superior Court of Justice injunction took effect. OPP decided not to launch the enforcement operation the public order plan contemplated until the morning of February 12. OPP made this decision because it had become dark early, the crowd of protestors had swelled, protestors were becoming more abrasive and confrontational, and protestors were expecting the police to act that evening.

OPP, WPS, and other assisting police services began an enforcement action to implement the public order plan on the morning of February 12. The operation paused on the evening of February 12. At that time, the POU line extended for less than half one kilometer from north of College Avenue to Millen Street. Deputy Chief Crowley described the night of February 12-13 as the peak of uncivil behaviour by protestors. He noted that the crowds had swelled, there was a party atmosphere with drinking, that crowds were present at Tecumseh Road and at the north side of the bridge, that there was a bomb threat, and that PLT reported that protestors were in a poor mental state. Protestors made some surges at the POU line that forced police to bring additional officers to the line to avoid losing the line. The operation resumed on the morning of February 13, and police completed clearing the bridge later that day. The police charged protestors they arrested with mischief over \$5,000 and breach of a court order under the *Criminal Code*. Most of these charges are still pending in the courts. Deputy Chief Crowley estimated that up to 730 officers (both POU and non-POU) participated in the operation, and that as many as 500-600 OPP officers were present at one point.

Deputy Chief Crowley expressed his opinion that the operation was a success. He stated that no one was injured and that the police did not have to make many arrests. He attributed the success of the operation to the adoption of the OPP's public order enforcement plan and follow-through on that plan. He observed that WPS was under pressure to act more quickly, but he credited the decision to wait until the OPP arrived and developed a public order enforcement plan for the operation's success. He also noted that the OPP and WPS did not switch CICs during the blockade as occurred in Ottawa, which he stated would have undermined operational effectiveness.

The Aftermath of the Blockade

On February 13, WPS and OPP adopted a traffic plan. Under the traffic plan, WPS laid jersey barriers down towards Tecumseh Road. These concrete barriers blocked vehicle access to Tecumseh Road. WPS and OPP monitored and adjusted the plan to maintain the integrity of the area that had been cleared.

WPS did not establish defined protest areas to facilitate lawful protest on public or private property after they cleared the bridge. Deputy Chief Crowley stated that Chief Bellaire relayed to him that WPS had decided not to do so as a result of lessons learned during the Freedom Convoy's occupation of Ottawa. WPS was concerned that if the protestors found a sympathetic private owner to host them, the police could not make them leave. WPS accordingly confirmed with nearby businesses and school boards that they did not



want the protestors on their property. WPS did not know where the departing protestors would go, and wanted them to return home.

On February 21, WPS developed a demobilization plan. That plan addressed the handoff from OPP to WPS, as OPP officers began to leave around that time for Ottawa. To staff the demobilization plan, Deputy Chief Crowley cancelled WPS days off for the February 21-27 period. On OPP's advice, the demobilization plan envisioned slowly reopening east-west streets over the course of a month in order to maintain the integrity of the area that the public order enforcement operation cleared. Deputy Chief Crowley explained that WPS sought and followed OPP's advice because OPP had experience with large-scale public order operations and WPS did not.

Lessons and Ongoing Challenges

Deputy Chief Crowley identified several lessons from the Ambassador Bridge that WPS has learned and, in some cases, already begun to act on. These lessons include the following:

- 1) Develop a standing plan to secure the Ambassador Bridge and other critical border infrastructure in the event of a protest or public order event.
 - WPS has developed this plan and has the ability to quickly disseminate it.
- 2) Provide PLT training to WPS officers.
 - WPS has arranged for OPP to provide PLT training to WPS officers.
- 3) Develop public order policing expertise within WPS.
 - Deputy Chief Crowley explained that WPS did not have a POU team and that he did not have a public order policing background. He stated that he lacked the experience to plan a public order operation, and that WPS's initial plan reflected his and WPS's lack of experience with public order policing. He expressed the view that, if WPS had a POU team in place at the time of the blockade, it could have adopted a more robust plan and acted more rapidly.
- 4) Improve internal and external communications.
- 5) Improve staffing processes.
 - Deputy Chief Crowley mentioned that staffing logistics and scheduling were very difficult, and that four WPS members were preparing staffing sheets by hand during the blockade.

Deputy Chief Crowley also identified WPS's lack of policing resources as a continuing challenge. He explained that WPS lacked the resources to sufficiently staff the police response at the outset of the blockade. He further stated that WPS currently only has the capacity to police a public order event at the Ambassador Bridge involving less than 50



protestors, and that if 50 or more protestors appeared WPS would have to seek assistance from OPP and/or other police agencies. Deputy Chief Crowley questioned whether it was appropriate for WPS, a municipal police force, to be responsible for security at the Windsor-Detroit border crossings.